



CLAY GEERDES' COMIX WAVE 91 © 1990.
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SEX SELL

Last Gasp was the only underground company on hand at Wonder Con in Oakland this May. Publisher Ron Turner spent a lot of his time asking boys for their ID cards, a role obviously uncomfortable for him. He told me the Vice Squad came around to his table in San Diego in the Summer of 1989 and was going to bust him for selling CHERRY, because her nipples were showing through the sheer blouse she wore on one cover. Ron talked his way out of the bust by explaining to the cop that he would have to bust every dealer in the room because they were all selling the same type of material, women fighting crime in skintight leotards or nonfunctional shorts and halters, cheesecake for young boys in the painful grip of puberty.

We live in an era of sex sell unlike any other. Nearly every major corporate advertiser uses sex to sell the product, but does the Vice Squad show up at General Foods or General Motors or Lucasfilm or MGM? Does the Vice Squad show up at television stations that show ads for soft drinks? Where was the Vice Squad at the last MISS AMERICA contest when all those women were criss-crossing the stage in bathing suits that left their buns hanging out?

The big difference is whether or not the content is latent or manifest. In ads, sex is associated with the product, but the act is supposedly latent. The big food and beverage companies don't want you to see their ads and race to the nearest massage parlor or brothel for a quickie. They want you to drink a can of sugary water or eat some salty fat chips while you beat your dummy.

The sex in a comic like CHERRY is there for your entertainment. It is all manifest, all up front. CHERRY is pure sex fantasy and if you get off on her antics, fine; if you don't, well, there's always the next Miss America contest. This is what makes CHERRY an enemy of the Vice Squad, protectors of Corporate American Money. They resent her latents being manifest. She's not addicting you to caffeine, nicotine, alcohol, sugar and cholesterol and

PLOP ART

In the sixties we referred to random art attacks as *happenings* but these days they have a new name. It was *plop art* when Richard List plopped a plastic drop cloth over the statue of the Golden Bear that sits in lower Sproul Plaza on the University of California campus at Berkeley. List left a sign nearby which admonished passers-by to use a condom. To List, plop art is advertising, boring ads on billboards, and his own pieces carry socially relevant messages. Ah, well, you can buy life-sized condoms in the novelty stores around Berkeley and I suspect this year's round of Hallowe'en parties will exhibit more than a few condomheads.

violence shown on television is a direct substitute for the sexual acts which are prohibited by a sexually repressive superstructure. Okay to show a woman strangled or beaten or shot or scalded to death in a shower, but not okay to show her having any kind of normal sex.

Overground comics have developed an extremely ambivalent attitude toward sexuality during the past decade and I am sure this attitude is communicating itself to the young reader. Comics that used to be kid comics in the sense that kids from six to fourteen were comfortable with the fantasies in them are now filled with themes that are beyond their emotional and intellectual capacity. Oh, Sure, DC will say THE KILLING JOKE was aimed at a more mature readership, but I know the kids who are into Batman's trip bought it or got an older friend to buy it for them. THE KILLING JOKE was a brutal and mean-spirited book, filled with graphic violence, gore, and sado-masochism.

And the Vice Squad worries about a kid seeing a nipple through a t-shirt?

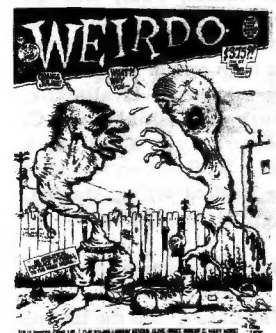
Remember Piper Laurie as vice cop mommy in the film of CARRIE referring to her breasts as *dirty pillows* then think about all those bare breasts that appear in ads in the *women's* magazines. While breasts may be erotic to guys, they are problems to the women who have to deal with them. They are always too big or too small or they don't grow evenly or they itch or break out or get lumpy or the aureoles get hairy or you name it, but I have yet to meet a woman who didn't have one or more of these problems on the way to adulthood. A woman told me once that the only perfect breasts were in the *men's* magazines and most of those had to be enhanced with silicone implants and airbrushed to get that way.

I have to laugh at the absurdity of public hypocrisy versus private perversity. A few years ago Howard Chaykin was doing AMERICAN FLAGG, a socially-satirical comic that I enjoyed, and one which was certainly not aimed at the kid reader. Well, FLAGG was sold to kids and it was right there on the rack with all the beefy superheroes in their underwear but when Chaykin did BLACK KISS recently, where was it displayed in the stores? With the underground comix. When I heard that LEATHER AND LACE was being printed in both kid and adult versions, I had to wonder what universe this was. How could a title like LEATHER AND LACE possibly apply to the Care Bear and Ninja Turtle junkies?

further enriching the giant drug cartels that run today's world. All Cherry is selling is a comic book.

And kids are always the excuse. You couldn't put Cherry on television because of the kids, right? Yet a movie about Archie and his pals recently appeared on CBS and, though Archie is and always has been a kid comic and not an adult comic, guess what happened in that prime time movie? Veronica came over to see Archie and she stripped down to a black lace teddy and tried to seduce the lovable nerd right there in front of all the eight-year-olds! Not only that, but a few scenes later Betty showed up and stripped down to a white teddy and tried to seduce Arch! Then there was Jughead's girl friend wearing a skimpy little outfit—but, hey, this is all okay, huh? It's not a nasty underground comic out to titillate the prurient interest of prepubescent boys, but a nice family television movie. A couple of ten year old boys trick Betty into bending over so they can look up at her white panties while my Mom and her octagenarian friends watch? This is okay, but Cherry should be busted as a dirty comic book? Get real, America. There is more raunchy sexuality on television every minute than you'll see in a decade of underground comix. What made Madonna a star? She danced onstage in her underwear and wore garish make-up that outraged feminist mothers and sold tons of records to their daughters. She was just what an establishment record company needed to lash back at feminism.

A good motto for underground comix would be Better Blatant Than Latent. The overground has always based its books on the concept of the tease. What the reader buys is the possibility that he might see it all in the next issue, because he never sees it in the current one. While secrecy and the promise of pubes to come work as a sales technique, they have never had a positive effect on the readership. Kids need the straight facts about sexuality, not ambiguity. A comic book like CHERRY is a lot healthier than an overground comic which stimulates the reader's anticipation but only delivers satisfaction in terms of brutality and violence. And, yes, the overt



CARTOONISTS AT WONDER CON

Larry Todd was sitting at a table pencilling a Ninja Turtle when I stopped by. His new baby slept nearby. Mark Bodé was inking one of the turtles. Larry is into dinosaur t-shirts and Mark was just about to go and perform his father's **CARTOON CONCERT**. Larry Welz had a box of Cherrys before him next to some sketches of her. Steve Lafler was back from New York. He was looking at some rubber stamps in a sample case. Roger May was wearing a Robert Williams t-shirt done for the second Berkeley Con. I wondered how it lasted so long and he said he wore it once a year. I guess I still have one in a box in the basement somewhere. Shelby hugged me and said hello. Another Berkeley Con vet. She still lives in Berkeley. Dan O'Neill was playing the **COMIC BOOK CONFIDENTIAL** movie on a vcr and I could hear two O'Neill's talking simultaneously. He said the women at the pool table worked for the Mitchell Brothers and the scene took place in Art and Jim's office at the O'Farrell Theater in San Francisco. Crabman was leaving the dealers' room as I walked in. He's been drawing **ROCKERS** for Rip Off Press. I had coffee with Valentino who is now doing **GUARDIANS OF THE GALAXY** for Marvel. He told me he was putting in 70 hours a week. Mike Manyak was wearing the badge Greg Irons drew for the first Berkeley Con. It took place in 1973 and Mike Friedrich was a guest there; now he's working with Wonder Con and doing the same kind of work I had to do. I knew everyone on the scene then. Today I know most of the people behind the scenes, but very few of the newcomers manning the artists' tables. I think it's a tougher, more impersonal scene now, and if I had any summation I would say *too much business and not enough fun*. They have people working some of the pro booths who can mouth a line of hype as though it was an actual thought they just had.

I looked around for Ron Turner to bid farewell, but he was gone. His son had a Little League game that afternoon. Reminded me that Ron published Jim Himes' **BIG LEAGUE LAFFS** back in the Golden Age of ugs, one of or perhaps the only underground sports comic.

-Clay Geerdes, May 16, 1990

JAMES MAURY HENSON [1936-1990]

Muppet master Jim Henson died of pneumonia at New York Hospital in Manhattan on May 15, 1990. He was 53. He was born September 24, 1936, in Greenville, Mississippi. His father, Paul, was an agronomist with the U. S. Department of Agriculture. Jim Henson's career began when he joined a high school puppet club after his family moved to Hyattsville, Maryland, a suburb of Washington, D.C. After high school, he got a job as a puppeteer on a local NBC station and kept the job while he studied acting, staging, and scenic design at the University of Maryland.

Jim Henson first appeared on Tv in a Washington production of Larry Harmon's *Bozo The Clown*, but the first of his characters to appear on national TV

was Rowlf the Dog, a muppet originally designed for a dog food commercial. Operated by Henson and Frank Oznowicz, Rowlf the Dog was featured on The Jimmy Dean Show which aired in 1963. This prime time variety show lasted three seasons. Rowlf returned in July of 1967 as the host of **OUR PLACE**, a summer replacement for the **SMOTHERS BROTHERS SHOW**. **SESAME STREET** began on the 10th of November, 1969, developed by Joan Ganz Cooney, executive director of the Children's Television Workshop, a company established in 1967 to produce the series. The show was set along a city street and aimed at inner-city pre-schoolers. Blending skits, songs, puppetry, film footage, and animation, **SESAME STREET** taught reading, writing, and arithmetic through entertainment. The shows were sponsored by particular letters or numbers presented as commercials. Jim Henson's Muppets were a major part of the world of Sesame Street. Ernie, Bert, Grover, Oscar the Grouch, and The Cookie Monster all had their fans. Big Bird was played by Frank Oz in the early shows and later by Carroll Spinney.

From 1976 to 1981, The Muppets starred in their own half-hour comedy. Kermit the Frog emceed and introduced the guest star who might be Julie Andrews one day and Dolly Parton the next. ABC rejected the show because they did not think adults would watch, so Henson took it to England where it went on to become the most popular first-run syndicated series in TV history. Miss Piggy became a star on the show and her relationship with Kermit is comparable to that of Ignatz and Krazy Kat. She went on to headline a series of Muppet movies, including **THE GREAT MUPPET CAPER**. Jim Henson was the voice of many of his characters, the Mel Blanc of puppetry.

Henson received numerous awards for his work. He was given an award by the National Academy of Television Arts and Sciences for Outstanding Achievement in Children's Programming for the 1973-74 season, and again in 1978-79 for The Muppets of **SESAME STREET**. Outstanding Individual Achievement in Children's Programming in 1975-76 season. Outstanding Comedy-Variety or Music Series for 1977-78 was **THE MUPPET SHOW**. In the 1980-81 Season, Jim Henson was awarded for Outstanding Writing in a Variety, Music, or Comedy Program for his script for **THE MUPPET SHOW**, featuring Carol Burnett.

Henson and his crew made a number of advances in the art of puppetry and developed a lot of new methods of staging and presentation which were influential in the work of people like George Lucas and Steven Spielberg. The rights to the Muppet characters were sold to The Walt Disney Company in 1989. -C.G.

TALES OF JERRY 8 is \$3 pp from Jane Oliver, 244 S. A St., Santa Rosa, CA 95401.

HEY, NEETERS! 4 is \$1.45 pp from Mike Sagara, POB 1378, Belmont, CA 94002.

Sez Mike: How do you make a fortune in small press?

Answer: You start with a big one.

HALF-ASSED COMICS is \$2 from D. Hellman and S. M. Taggart, POB 901, Old Chelsea Station, NY, NY 10113. 8 1/2 x 11/B/W 24pp. Recommended. CG.

For info on R. Crumb's **YOLO PORTFOLIO**, send SASE to Water Row Books, POB 438, Sudbury, MA 01776.

Yes, **Rip Off Comix** is still being published. You can get information on the latest issue from POB 4686, Auburn, CA 95604. Kitchen Sink will send you a free catalog if you write to them at 2 Swamp Rd., Princeton, WISC 54968.

SKUZZ BUTTS COMIX is \$2.45 pp from Jeff Gillette, 1998 Huntington, Grosse Pointe Woods, MI 48236.

MISC 34 is \$2 pp from Randy Paske, 4841 Birch Lane, Gilbert, MN 55741. **THE STAMP COLLECTION** is \$2 from the same address.

TALES OF THE DESIGNERREAL UNIVERSE 2 and 3 for \$3 pp from Rikki Leeson, POB 581, Seattle, WA 98105.

Last Gasp has published a nice collection of Larry Welz' **CHERRY**. Larry was on hand at Wonder Con in Oakland in May signing copies for his fans. **CHERRY** is up to issue #9. Fan mail to Larry should go to POB 4662, Santa Rosa, CA 95402. Hunt Emerson's **FIRKIN THE CAT** is in its third issue. **WEIRDO** ends for awhile with issue #27. I was told the Crumb family was moving to France and a few months down the line we might see a more international **WEIRDO**. #27 features Crumb, S. Clay Wilson, Bruce Duncan, Carol Lay, and many of your favorites. John Howard's **HORNY BIKER SLUT COMICS** #1 is Last Gasp's latest comic book. Write to 2180 Bryant Street, San Francisco, CA 94110 for a catalog if you cannot get these underground comix in your area. Remember to include a statement that you are a bonafide adult or they can not do business with you.

WILDMAN 7 is \$2.50 pp from Richard Green, PO BOX 46825, Chicago, IL 60648. Ask about back issues.

The second issue of **RAW**, the book, is out from Penguin Books. Cover by Joost Swarte. Featured are Lynda Barry, Drew Friedman, Justin Green, Artie Spiegelman, and numerous other artists.

BACK IN CIRCULATION: A Quasi-Autobiography by Steven F. Scharff is 50c/Stamp from 2020 Ostwood Terrace, Union, NJ 07083.

PUMA BLUES 22 and 23 have been published by Mirage. Queries re this environmentally oriented comic should be addressed to POB 774, Northampton, MA 01061-0774.

In the latest issue of **RESEARCH**, we learn that Zip, the pinhead who worked with Barnum's circus in the 1920s and was the inspiration for Bill Griffith's Zippy, was an American Negro.